Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Doctrine of Saving Faith, Part 3
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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I want to go back to our subject of the faith that saves. What is saving faith? We understand that salvation is by faith alone. That is a foundational truth in Christian teaching, a biblical truth, salvation is by faith alone. But that then poses the question, what kind of faith saves? What is the faith that saves? And so we have been looking at that.

You might want to go back to Hebrews chapter 11 because this is where we really left off a few weeks ago. And the first question we asked is what is faith? What is faith? And we heard the answer in chapter 11 verse 1, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." We also noted down in verse 6 that without faith it is impossible to please Him, that is to please God. Faith is necessary. Faith is being assured of things hoped for, being convinced of things invisible. And so we looked at a definition of faith in our first message. And we said that this kind of faith involves three things, knowledge, assent and trust...to know, to affirm as true, that is to believe, and then to entrust.

We also said that this faith has both an objective and a subjective dimension. That is, it is an objective faith in that it is directed at a specific object. It is not just faith in faith, or faith in anything. You hear people today talk about, "I'm a person of faith...I'm a person who lives by faith...I have faith." And the immediate question I want to ask is, "In whom do you have faith?" Faith to be valid and legitimate must be directed in some object. And we know that objective faith is directed at the person of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, believing in God, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection is essential. If you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, you will be saved. So faith has an objective component, and that is it is directed at a specific object.

It also has a subjective component. It embodies penitence. It embodies sorrow over sin. It involves a longing to know God. It involves a desire for holiness, a hunger for righteousness, a thirst for virtue. It involves a desire to escape from sin and its consequences. It is a heart-wrenching sense that you have to abandon everything you put your trust in and you have no hope of ever doing anything to please God. And so you must completely deny yourself and come to Him as a child with nothing to bring and nothing to offer. So there is an objective component of faith, that is the object to whom it is directed. There is a subjective element of faith and that is the nature of that faith at all, in that it is totally disillusioned with one's own self or one's own ability to achieve anything good before God.

Abandoning everything, turning from sin in repentance, it embraces the object of faith, Jesus Christ who alone can save.

And that led us to a second question. Not only what is faith, but what does faith trust, or in whom does faith place its trust? And we go back then to verse 6. The one who comes to God must believe that He is. You must put your faith in the God who is God, not just any god, or not just a god of your own making, your own fabrication, but the God who is God. That is then the God who is Trinity, the God who is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who is one with His Son and one with His Spirit, that is the God of Scripture. The God who is, verse 6, a rewarder of those who seek Him. That is, the God who promises eternal life to those who seek Him, who promises forgiveness of sin to those who seek Him, who promises grace and full redemption to those who seek Him.

What is faith? It is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It has an objective component. It is directed at someone specific. It has a subjective element. It is characterized by self-denial, repentance, bankruptcy that casts oneself at the feet of God, at the feet of Christ pleading for mercy. The object is God alone, the true and living God alone who gives eternal life to those who believe. He is a rewarder in the sense that He rewards with eternal life those who repent and come to Him. This is the God of Scripture. This is the Creator/God who is also the God and Father who is one with our Lord Jesus Christ. O we have asked the question...what is faith and what does faith trust, or in whom does faith trust?

And that brings us to a third question that I want us to address tonight and next week, how does faith act? How does faith act? Or how does faith behave? And we know it behaves because that's what the rest of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews is about. Verse 4, "By faith Abel offered...by faith Enoch was taken up and not found, for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God, by faith he was pleasing to God." Verse 7, "By faith Noah in reverence prepared an ark." "By faith Abraham obeyed." "By faith Sarah received the ability to conceive." Verse 20 talks then about Isaac, "By faith he blessed." Jacob, "By faith blessed each of his sons." Joseph also, "When he was dying made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel and gave orders concerning his bones." That is to say he believed in the promise that God had made and he passed it on. "By faith Moses..." this faith, first of all, the faith of his parents, but Moses himself, verse 24, when he grew up, "By faith refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to endure ill treatment with the people of God rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." It was faith in the hearts of those who marched around the walls of Jericho, according to verse 30, that caused the walls to fall down. It was faith that caused Rahab the harlot to be obedient, to welcome the spies, to receive the knowledge of the true and living God. It was the faith exhibited in the action of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets who conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong, became mighty, put on armies...foreign armies to

flight. It was by faith women received back their dead by resurrection. It was by faith that others were tortured, not accepting their release, looking to a better resurrection. By faith others experienced such persecution as mockings and scourgings and chains and imprisonment, were stoned and sawn in half, tempted, put to death with the sword. They went about in sheepskins, goatskins, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering in deserts, mountains, caves, holes in the ground. All these things were done by faith. This is faith in action.

So, faith begins with a definition of what it is. It moves then to who it trusts. And then it moves finally to how it acts. This is a chapter on faith and it tells us what it is, in whom it trusts and how it acts. And all those are verbs. "By faith..." and then you have a verb because faith always acts. It always acts. That is to say, faith is not static, it is a transformation in life. And in chapter 12 verse 1, very familiar verse, "Therefore since we have so great a cloud of witnesses," this is a cloud of witnesses just named in chapter 11, and what are they witnessing to? They're witnessing to a life of faith. The power and the conviction of faith, the endurance of faith, they're witnessing to the power of living by faith. And so, as they give us that testimony, he says, "Let us lay aside every encumbrance the sin which so easily entangles us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith." And so we are called to live a life of faith and to follow the testimony of those who live by faith and were blessed by God and rewarded eternally.

So chapter 12 is the therefore based upon the clear testimony of the power of the life of faith in all the people in chapter 11, we are called to live by faith. And faith is described here, not as a static attitude, but as a race. It is a race that must be run with endurance. Eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. So faith is action. It's a verb in every case all through chapter 11 and here it's a verb, a very active verb, it's running a race.

Now with that in mind, I want to take you to a passage for tonight and next time that is familiar, it needs careful treatment. James chapter 2...James chapter 2. We never talk about faith without ultimately ending up in James chapter 2. And this is a very important chapter to deal with because it's very often misunderstood. James chapter 2 and verse 14, let me read down through verse 20. James 2:14 to 20. "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" Let me stop there just to say that would be the static faith, the substantive in the sense that it's a noun faith. But there's no verb, there's no ongoing flow. Can that kind of faith save him? "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food and one of you says to him, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so, faith if it has no works is dead, being by itself. Well someone may well say, you have faith and I have works, show me your faith without the works and I'll show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one, you do well. The demons also believe and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless, or as your Bible might say, dead?"

What is James saying here? He is saying that faith has to have action to be the real thing. Psychologist Dr. Alfred Adler holds in his interesting theory of individual psychology this, he says, quote: "When dealing with people, trust only in movement." Boy, that is a really true statement. Trust only in movement. Don't trust in what people say. Don't trust in how they respond when caught in some kind of trap or some kind of disaster or some kind of sin. Trust in movement. He goes on to say, "Life happens at the level of action. We are not what we say, we are what we do. What we do is the real key to our motivation, or out intention." When dealing with people, I'll say it again, trust only in movement. And he has observed as sometimes psychologists and psychiatrists do, he has observed precisely what the Word of God teaches. To paraphrase what James said, faith without works means nothing. Faith plus nothing equals nothing. This is dead faith. Back to verse 17, faith if it has no works is dead. Verse 20, faith without works is useless. Verse 26, end of the verse, faith without works is dead.

And inevitably people with dead faith will always substitute words for deeds. Back in Malachi chapter 2 verse 17, the prophet indicts them. He says, "You have wearied the Lord with your words." God is tired of your profession. Yet you say, "How have we wearied Him? In that you say everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord and He delights in them, or where is the God of justice?" God is sick of hearing your complaints. He's tired of hearing your words. He has just gone through two chapters of indicting them for the absence of any righteous deeds. And even their words, of course, question the character of God.

True faith is sin in works. It is not seen any other way. And the point that we want to understand about this passage is this, there is a kind of faith in God, a kind of faith in Jesus Christ that is dead. It is dead. That is it produces nothing and therefore it is nothing. If it produces nothing, it is nothing. It can't be anything but nothing. Do you remember John the Baptist in Matthew chapter 3 preaching? And all Jerusalem going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confess their sins? "When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'" They were like snakes scrambling toward the river in the time of a brush fire. Why are you running for the water? He says this, "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance." And don't think you can get away with claiming Abraham as your father, the axe is already laid at the root and the tree is about ready to fall. Judgment is about ready to come. Your words are meaningless, bring forth fruit that fits a genuine repentance.

This message is repeated again and again and again. In the seventh chapter, come to the closing of the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord says, "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire so then you will know them by their fruit." John chapter 8, Jesus said, "If you continue in My Word, then

you're My real disciple. Otherwise, no matter what you claim...He later on says...you're of your father the devil."

Valid saving faith is always verified by fruit. It's always verified by works. In John 15 Jesus says there are some who are attached to Me, superficial lifeless branches attached to Me, they bear no fruit, they will be cut off, gathered together and burned. False faith, dead faith is indicated by the absence of righteous action. And it is frankly clear that many, many people possess that kind of faith. I would venture to say it's probably safe to say in our time today most people who call themselves Christians far and away possess this kind of non-saving dead faith. And that of all the people who call themselves Christians, it's a small group that are really Christians manifesting saving faith by virtue of action. I think I mentioned a few weeks ago that a recent study says 85 percent of people in America claimed to be Christian, on the same survey indicates nine percent of them say they have a biblical world view. Well what is a Christian but someone with a biblical world view? Most people who call themselves Christians possess this kind of faith.

Jesus was concerned about it. He talked about good and bad soil. True conversion where fruit was born and temporary superficial kinds of responses without fruit that eventually wither and die. He talked about wheat and tares. True believers and false believers growing together in the same field. He talked, as I said, in John 15 about branches that abide and bear fruit and branches that don't bear fruit and are cut off and thrown into the fire. He talked about those who profess and those who possess. He talked about those who build their house on a rock on a true foundation of saving faith, and those who build their house on sand. I mean, these images are all through Scripture, not only from the lips of our Lord, but basically all the writers of the New Testament are drawn to consider these things. In Hebrews, for example, chapter 10 verse 38, is a quote taken out of the Old Testament book of Habakkuk which says, "My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." We're not of those who shrink back to destruction, but those who have a persevering faith.

There's a kind of faith that perseveres to the end, that's where we started our doctrinal series, an ongoing faith, a faith that acts, that moves forward, that gives evidence of real transformation. And then there is that false faith that does not save.

Nicodemus, the teacher in Israel, John 3, Nicodemus was a formidable person in Judaism. He would affirm loudly that he was a believer in God. He even affirmed that Jesus was a teacher come from God. And though he believed in the God of the Old Testament as he understood Him, and though he believed that Jesus had come from God as a teacher, Jesus didn't say to him, "Hey, just another step or two and you'll be okay." He said, "You've got to go back and be born all over again." You've got to go all the way back to the beginning. Whatever it is that you believe is not sufficient to save you. Intellectual belief is not enough. Only a transformed life verifies salvation. Matthew 7, "Many will say

to Me, Lord, Lord, we did this, we did that, we preached, we cast out demons, we did wonderful works in Your name. And He'll say, Depart from Me, I never knew you...I never knew you." Lots of profession, lots of words, but the Lord is looking for evidence, action. That's why Hebrews 12:14 says, "Without sanctification," that is without ongoing separation from sin unto righteousness, "no one will ever see the Lord."

And it's important, beloved, to preach this kind of thing. There are people who say, "Well, you know, this is making people feel insecure." Of course, that's the point. We want the people who should feel insecure to feel insecure, right? We don't want to comfort the disillusion, we don't want to comfort those who are deceived. What value is there in that? And yet there is a reluctance to do that. We just want to embrace everybody who even breathes the word Jesus as if they are true believers. We have to deal with the soul-damning impression that the simple knowledge about God and about Christ and about the gospel and even believing that is not necessarily enough. It is certainly damning not to believe, but even to believe may be damning and much more deceptive.

There are people who think that what men don't deny they believe. If they don't deny the gospel, maybe they don't know it. If they don't deny Christ, maybe they don't know about Him. But they just believe whatever it is that's...that's the best they can muster up, that's all God cares about. In other words, there is an increasing commitment to minimalist kind of faith. James will not allow that and James here is the instrument of God Himself. He will not allow any deception about non-saving faith to go unchallenged. There are a lot of people who know about God, know about Christ, believe Jesus died, believe He rose again, believe He's the Savior, but make no real irrevokable commitment to the lordship of Christ, no self-denying cross-bearing commitment to obedience. And they need to be confronted with the real condition in which they exist.

In fact, this whole epistle is about that. I won't take time to drag you all through it. But they're all tests, much like 1 John. They're all tests that expose the reality of our faith. In chapter 1, the test of trials, then the test of temptation, then the test of how you respond to the Word, which we'll look at a little later. Then the test of how you treat the poor and the needy. And now it's sort of all wrapped up in this test, the test of your works that we are coming to in James chapter 2 verse 14 and following.

Now James is saying to us if your faith is without any works, your faith is meaningless. It's meaningless. And by the way, this isn't the first mention of the matter. Go back to verse 22, chapter 1, James 1 verse 22, we need to kind of touch base with this and then come back to our text. James says in verse 22, "Prove yourselves doers of the Word and not merely hearers who delude themselves." Self-deluded people who hear and don't do, they don't give themselves up, they don't deny themselves, take up the cross, follow Christ. They don't sell all to purchase the pearl, sell all to purchase the treasure in the field. They aren't willing to lose their life to find it. They aren't willing to repent of all their sin and hunger for thirst...and thirst for righteousness. They hear, they like what

they hear, they maybe believe what they hear and they are self-deluded because they are not doers. There again the test of faith is action. The self-deceived hear and do nothing. For them faith is static. O sure, I'm a Christian. Why? I believe in God. Why? I believe in Jesus. I believe He died on a cross. I believe He rose from the dead. I don't want to argue with that. And so with nothing more than a carnal glance at the reality of God, and the reality of Christ, they convince themselves that they are Christians. That their kind of faith is sufficient to save. And so in verse 23, James says, "Anyone who is a hearer of the Word and not a doer is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he's immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."

In other words, what he's saying is, these kind of people are frivolous. They take very superficial, frivolous, quick glances, light brushes with God, Christ, the gospel, the truth. By the way, mirrors in ancient times were not glass, they were metal. They were pounded metal highly polished, but they were distorted. And unless you kind of moved it around, looked carefully, you are going to be distorted looking into metal. You know, you've seen your face in a piece of sheet metal. Today we have a highly sophisticated way to refine that sheet metal to make it pretty good in terms of reflecting reality. But in ancient times it wasn't that good and when you look into that mirror, you might not get an actually precise view of yourself. But if you looked long enough and moved it around and worked at it, you might get a pretty good idea of what you look like. But once you look and go away, you immediately forgot what kind of person you were. This is the person who looks superficially at God, superficially at Christ, superficially at the gospel, superficially at Scripture, never really understanding his or her true condition, thinking, "Oh, I'm doing great," and off you go. Verse 26, he thinks he's religious, thinks he believes, thinks he's religious and yet he's deceived. It says, "Doesn't bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart." This man's religion is worthless. We're talking about people who look at the mirror. What's the mirror? It's the Law of God, it's the Word of God, it's the gospel. And he looks at it, or she looks at it and move it around a little bit and get some idea of what they look like, it's very superficial, very quick. And they're gone and they forget. And they go on thinking they're religious, they look fine.

Verse 25 then tells us the real problem. "The one who looks intensely at the perfect Law, the law of liberty, and abides by it not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does." This is not about looking and walking away and forgetting, this is about looking intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, that is the law that sets us free, the glory of the gospel, and abiding in it, believing it, accepting its revelation of oneself and going out to be obedient. This is the one who continues in the truth.

So James in chapter 1 introduces us to the reality of a non-saving faith as against a saving faith. A saving faith looks long and intensely at the truth and embraces it and holds to it and clings to it and does not forget it but goes out and obeys it. On the other hand, there are a lot of people who take a

quick glance, forget what they saw, and go on their way. So now in chapter 2, James goes back to the same theme again. He is concerned that people are self-deluded, that people are deceived, that people are damned. This is always to be the concern of the evangelist, always to be the concern of the evangelist, to warn about non-saving dead faith.

Reading an article today about Billy Graham and the comment was, "What makes him so beloved in the world is he's so inclusive." Well that's their view of things. Inclusive is good. If you can just embrace everybody and make no one feel bad and keep everything as light as possible, then you can collect people much more easily. But what about dead faith? What about the warnings? Multitudes of people have gone to hell who believed there was one God, who believed in Jesus Christ, believed He died for their sins, who believed He rose from the dead, who believed that He was the Savior, but they went to hell cause they never really committed themselves to Him, never truly repented of their sin, never fully embraced Him as Lord and Savior, never came hungry and thirsty for righteousness, never came humbled and broken and self-denying, willing to take up a cross and obey Him at any cost. I mean, my whole life has been full of people like this.

I pulled out some old notes the other day in my...in my study and was looking through and there was a time in the past when I sort of cycled through a lot of people that had come into my life and disappeared. I can think about a high-school buddy, played ball with him all through high school who was president of his youth group the same time I was president of the youth group in my church, who later...I'll never forget it...went to Redlands College which had Baptist roots once upon a time, he graduated there after we knew each other through the years of high school, played together, worked together, were good friends. Came out of that college as an atheist, rejected the faith and sustained that rejection.

I remember in my college days a buddy with whom I played football, we were kind of the tandem backs, both on defense and offense. His father was a pastor, my father was a pastor. He went to seminary. I went to seminary. He came out, totally rejected the faith. Got involved in the most horrific scandalous kind of conduct. Ended up in drugs and bizarre kind of behavior. Lost his teaching privileges at Cal State University Long Beach because he brought nudity into the classroom, bizarre things. Ended up with a week-end jail sentence for years, ended up promoting rock concerts. He and I taught Bible studies when we were college buddies.

I remember a student in seminary, the son of the Dean, who after graduating from seminary set up a Buddhist altar in his home. And I could tell you a lot more...a lot more.

Those are heartbreaking things. Those are sad realities. There are people who give evidences superficially that they are truly Christ's who are not. Superficially they get involved in the activity, but the real fruit isn't there. The perseverance and the endurance isn't there. And maybe it's because of those people. You know, maybe...I was pretty stunned by my friend in high school, and I was double

stunned by my friend in college cause we used to talk about being pastors together. And I was rocked to the core with my friend in seminary. And maybe that's why and that's how God prepared me to have such a strong passion for this matter of dead faith. I'm not counting heads, that's not the point. I'm not trying to keep a record of everybody I've met who has gone this direction, but there are enough that I couldn't if I wanted to. I live with the reality that there are people who have dead faith and it's heartbreaking. And sooner or later it tends to show up as it did with my friends.

Now let me give you a little background as to why James brings this up, okay? It's really important. Go back to chapter 1 verse 1, "James a bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes dispersed abroad, greeting." Twelve tribes, huh? So who is he writing? Not Gentiles, Jews. He's writing to Jews, those in the twelve tribes. He refers to them again in chapter 2 verse 21, "Was not Abraham our father?" They could all claim Abraham as their father, their ancestor. And the reason he's writing this is because there was a real danger in the proclamation of the gospel to the Jews because it was possible for the Jews to go from one extreme to another on the matter of works.

Here's what I mean. Being in the Jewish religion, they were literally overwhelmed with ritual, ceremony, external works. There were hundreds and hundreds of rules and laws they had to adhere to as well as what was biblical. The stress was on the efficacy of works. You're saved by your works. You're saved by what you do. And that was the essence of Jewish religion. And it was a massive burden. In fact, Jesus even talked about it being a burden that nobody could bear. And he said to them, on one occasion, "Come unto Me all you that are weary and heavy-laden," and He was talking about the burden of bearing this immense terrible guilt-producing stress of trying to earn your way into heaven by works.

Well along comes the gospel...along comes the gospel, the gracious message of the gospel. Not by works, by faith, faith alone, no works. This becomes a joyous alternative. This is wonderful news to those who have been guilt-ridden, who have borne this massive burden of law and legalism, tired of legalism. This sounds good to a Jew. Wow, you mean I can shed all of this stuff, I can dump all these works and just receive a gift? They were tired of the legalism, they were tired of the weight of their incessant failure to comply with the unbearable pressure to perform for divine approval. The high fear factor, along comes the message of grace and faith and some of these people were running toward Christianity and saying, "Wow, this is great." And I think that's true even today, "Isn't this great?" You read about it in the modern books written by the modern evangelicals. "Hey, you want to be forgiven of your sin? Hey, you want everything in life that God has for you? Pray these little words, Jesus, come into my life. Wow, now you've got it all." How easy is that? And you hear some smiley TV preacher who has absolutely nothing to say telling you that all you have to do is ask Jesus and He'll turn your life into an explosion of success and happiness and bliss and blessing. And it's all free. Very easy to go way too far the other way.

And I'm sure there were many Jews who misunderstood the message, just like people do today. They're all lining up to sign up with Jesus. It's so easy. There's no price, you don't have to repent, you don't have to confess anything. You don't have to be broken and contrite. You don't have to deny yourself and hate your mother and your father and be willing to follow Christ even to death if need be. It isn't the end of your life. You don't sell all. You don't lose your life. No, no, you just say these words and it's so easy. We don't put any guilt trip on you, just a big free-be. And so they misunderstood the freedom then and they misunderstand it now. The mistake and supposition is that since works can't save you, works are irrelevant. Works not being efficacious, that's the message of Paul, were considered by some therefore unnecessary. So that just believing was sufficient enough, a static kind of faith.

That would sound good to somebody steeped in legalism. I think it sounds good today. I think one of the reasons the Evangelical Movement is moving so fast and churches are having twenty thousand, thirty thousand and more people pouring into these big mega-churches is because this message is just too good. If you've been under any kind of burden of fear, this is the biggest free ticket that's been offered.

And I understand that. I mean, I understand how the Jews thought in the day of James because if you read some of the rabbinic writings back at that time...for example, I'll give you one from the Expositor's Greek New Testament, when Mar(?) Ukva(?) lay dying, this is a Jewish guy, tells the story about him. When Mar Ukva lay dying, he asked for his account. It amounted to seven thousand zuzeem(?). Now what he was wanting was to know from the priest how much he had given to the temple. And when the priest gave him the accounting, it was seven thousand...seven thousand zuzeem, that was the sum of all his alm giving. And according to this historical story, he cried out, "The way to God is far and the provision small." And the historian said he did not think this sum would be sufficient to insure his justification in the sight of God and thus could not gain himself salvation. So on his death bed, the historian says, he gave away half his fortune in order to make himself quite secure.

Well that's the kind of burden they lived under. In fact, early pagans used to accuse the Jews of joining Christianity because it was a cheaper religion than their own. It was easier. There's so much of that today, it's so easy. Just say these little words, do this little deal, greatest little prayer. That's the new message and it's the new message today. It's as if...it's as if we've gone over the side of the dead faith enterprise. And you can find people who are burdened with their lives, burdened with trying to please God, burdened out of fearing death, fearing judgment. You find people who are disappointed, disillusioned, unhappy, miserable, unfulfilled. Wow, I don't have to do anything, just pray this prayer. No, James wants to make sure that nobody is mistaken on this issue...nobody is mistaken on this issue.

To understand this then the context has to be clear. Behind the scenes here in James' ministry is the desire to shed the bondage of Jewish works righteousness, to shed the overwhelming burden that they have borne. But the danger was that you think it's so simple, just believe in a static moment and that's it. And what they got was a dead faith.

Now, James characterizes this dead faith three ways. Let's look at the text. He characterizes this dead faith three ways. One, it is an empty confession. It is an empty confession. Verse 14, "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but he has no works. Can that faith save him?" The Authorized Version says, "What does that profit? What good is it? Here's the person who claims to have faith in God and faith in Jesus. "But if a man says he has faith, for the sake of argument, if he makes that claim, if he says he believes in Jesus," and here it's present tense, "if he keeps on making the claim, if he continually says it, what good is such a claim if he has not *erga*, works, good works, righteous deeds, as the pattern of his life."

What does it matter if there's no action? What good is a faith with no product? The obvious answer is it's no good at all, nothing but an empty confession, an empty profession, an empty claim. There's no such thing as a saving faith that doesn't produce works. Now what kind of works might saving faith produce? Go back to chapter 1. Chapter 1 verse 12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial, endurance, to patiently and triumphantly endure, not to burn up and die like the plant with the rocky soil, but to endure, to show consistency in trial, under pressure, patience, the spirit of victory, triumph and hope in the midst of difficulty." That's one thing, endurance in faith under trial.

Another thing, verse 18, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the Word of truth so that we might be, as it were, the firstfruits among His creatures. This you know, my beloved brethren, to let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."

What he is saying here is this, if God's done His work in you, if He brought you forth by the Word of truth. If you have truly been regenerated and born again, you're going to be a firstfruits among His creatures. That is to say you're going to take on the character of one who is the product of divine birth. You're going to be regenerated, your life is going to be marked by God, you're going to have a God-likeness, a Christ-likeness. And you're going to be quick to listen, slow to speak. That is you're going to be attentive to the Word of God and slow to give your own opinion and get angry when somebody doesn't agree with it. Because you're consumed with the righteousness of God.

In verse 21, another thing. You're going to put aside all filthiness, all that remains of wickedness. You will in humility receive the Word implanted which is able to save your souls. You're going...you're going to direct your life toward purity and not filthiness, toward holiness and not wickedness, toward

humility and not pride. And verse 22, "You're going to be a doer of the Word," that is what the Word says is what you do. Verse 26, "You're going to bridle your tongue." Verse 27, "You're going to visit orphans and widows in their distress. You're going to love others. You're going to be sacrificial and you're going to keep yourself...verse 27...being unstained by the world." In chapter 4 verse 4, he puts it this way, "Friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." So you would definitely going to have a biblical world view. You're going to be characterized by love, chapter 9, love for the poor, you're not going to play favorites. Verse 8, you're going to love your neighbor as yourself. You're not going to show partiality. I mean, there are all these things. Chapter 3, you're going to be humble. I should say chapter 4 verse 6, "God is opposed to the proud, gives grace to the humble. You're going to submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God, cleanse your hands, purify your heart. You're going to be miserable, weep, mourn over your sin." Again verse 10, "Humbling yourself in the presence of the Lord." Those are some of the things that are going to mark you. Those are some of the evidences.

What good is it...back to chapter 2...James says...to make some kind of profession, or some kind of confession of saving faith when there are none of these things evident? It doesn't do any good at all, it's just empty, useless. And he asks at the end of verse 14, "Can that kind of faith save him?" Such a faith as that would deliver him...will it acquit him on judgment day? Can faith not accompanied by a moral transformation manifesting itself in conduct be true saving faith? True saving faith brings about a new birth, a new birth brings about a new life. Faith is seen in works. That faith can't save him, can it?

This is not, by the way, in conflict with what Paul taught. Paul taught works don't save you, but that works follow salvation. Paul says salvation is by grace through faith, apart from works. James says salvation is by grace through faith resulting in works. And James would agree with Paul and Paul would agree with James, there's no conflict there, both agree. There is a faith that doesn't save, and it is the faith that is devoid of works which means there's no real life there from God. That's why Hebrews 12:14 says, "Without holiness no man will see the Lord." You can't get there apart from holiness. Holiness, not something you earn but something God grants, the fruit of faith, not the root of faith.

So James is considering profession, empty confession, without evidence, doesn't do any good to make a claim if you can't back it up with your life. Hebrews 6:9, the writer of Hebrews says, "Think forth things that belong to salvation." Ephesians 2:8 to 10, "For by grace are you saved through faith..." we know all that. But he then says, "Unto good works which God has before ordained that you should walk in them." Not saved by works, saved unto works. And James says, "If they're not there, it's an empty claim, absolutely empty claim." No one is saved by works, no one is saved without producing works.

So, first of all, James looks at dead faith on the basis of an empty confession. Secondly, a false compassion. Dead faith manifests itself in a false compassion, verse 15, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and need of daily food, and one of you says to him, 'Go in peace, be warm, be filled,' yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so, faith if it has no works is dead, being by itself." Very practical illustration. He says if you come across someone who's naked, it can also mean ill-clothed, not necessarily stark naked, someone who is absolutely destitute. In need of daily food, starving to death...this is in grave, grave condition, serious despair, very severe, no food, no adequate clothing. And you come along and you say, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled." By the way, "go in peace" was a common Jewish expression. If you say that to that person, that's empty words, pious indifference, cold. If that's all that you're willing to do, what good is that? What good is that? That's...it's meaningless. It's just words without action, and that's a picture, that's a metaphor of your real spiritual condition. You may superficially articulate some false compassion, such as a person who would do that but there's really none in your heart because your heart has never been changed. That's just dead faith. Even so, faith is like that, it pretends to care, it pretends to love, but there's no selflessness, there's no real sacrifice, it's just theater.

And it reminds me of a story I read years ago about one of the queens of England going to the theater and weeping at the play in a cold winter night, only to find when she went back to her carriage that her carriage driver had frozen to death waiting for her. At which point her biographer says, "She was only angry." And the question was asked, how can you weep at fantasy and not at reality? But this is what it is to be dead, a dead faith, an empty confession, a false compassion like someone who speaks meaningless words to someone on the edge of death.

There's a third element to this dead faith, shallow conviction...shallow conviction....empty confession, false compassion, shallow conviction. Verse 18, "Now someone may well say you have faith and I have works, show me your faith without the works and I will show you my faith by my works." Someone...probably referring to James. James probably referring to himself. And he's going to ask the question, "You have faith, you say. Okay, I have works. Show me your faith without the works. Go ahead." You can't do it, can you? It's the acid test. Oh you say you have faith. Oh yeah, I have faith. How am I doing to know you have faith? Easy to say, very easy to say. Show me your faith without works. That's impossible, that is absolutely impossible, it can't be proven, it can't be done, you can't show anything without works. There's no way.

On the other hand, he says, "I'll show you my faith, the only way faith can ever be seen, by my works." How do you know your faith is real? By your works. If you don't see any works, you can't know the faith is real. It's impossible. And Peter affirms this in very strong language. Second Peter 1, we have this life and godliness and we have precious magnificent promises, we have escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. And then he starts in verse 5 with this, "Apply all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, in your moral excellence knowledge, and to your knowledge add

self-control and perseverance and godliness and brotherly kindness and love and if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, the way you know your knowledge is real is when you see the fruit. And the one who lacks these qualities is blind and short-sighted and really doesn't know whether he's been purified. You can only make your own salvation clear to you by looking at the fruit. The same is true for anyone else. In fact, he drives this home so powerfully in verse 19, "You believe that God is one," and that was the great, you know, monotheism, that was the great unique reality of the true and living God against the polytheism of the world, the many gods. "You believe in the one God, that God is one. Wonderful, the demons also believe and tremble." They've got one on you, at least they tremble. Oh, you say you believe in God, how interesting. Oh yes, I believe in God. You say you believe in Christ. Yes, I believe in Jesus, I prayed that prayer about Jesus. You do well, the demons also believe and they're not saved, but at least they have the sense to tremble, to shudder.

So you have an intellectual acceptance of God. You have an intellectual acceptance of Christ. This is what I call shallow conviction. You have come to the belief that something is true. And he says, "You do well," that's pure sarcasm. The demons are fundamentalists. The demons are orthodox. They believe all the facts about God, Christ and Scripture. That can't save them. And they tremble, they shudder. Literally in the Greek, to bristle. You know what that word means to bristle? To have your hair stand on end. It's a word that means the demons suffer by what they believe a severe degree of terror. They know what awaits the godless. And I am afraid that evangelicalism is filled with people who have dead faith and go about happily, giddily saying they believe in God, and they believe in Jesus and their hair doesn't bristle because they have no idea of the judgment that awaits those whose faith is dead. The demons, they know what's coming. Dead faith is inferior to demon faith. Demons believe the right things, but they do not love righteousness and they do not hate evil. They do not love God. They just believe the right stuff because they know it's true. And dead faith is even below that, it is that foolish superficial faith that produces nothing, not even a sense of terror that their faith might be dead.

And so, in verse 20 James sums it up. "Are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" Foolish is empty headed, brain dead we would say. That faith without works is fruitless, idle, unproductive, barren, dead, demon faith. James' concern should be our concern. And how we should rejoice to see the work of God in our lives that parallels the work of God in the lives of the heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. Well, let's run with endurance the faith race as God manifests true fruit through our lives.

Our Father, we thank You that You have given us such clarity. As always, we are stunned by the perspicuity or the clarity of Scripture. We know that there is a faith that is temporary, a faith that has but a slight and insufficient touch upon the heart. It tastes the heavenly gift. It tastes the good Word of God. It tastes the power of the world to come. And in this faith the mind might be enlightened, the

heart may be affected with some momentary joy, the life perhaps in some measure reformed, at least from the more vile sins, what Peter called escaping the pollutions of the world. But the work isn't deep, the joy isn't permanent, and when temptation comes and testing and trial and persecution and difficulty, it proves to be dead faith. Lord, we know that this is a very common deception. Many are persuaded that Jesus is the Savior, Son of God, and they have in some way embraced this, in some measure they commit to the hope of His salvation. They may depend upon His promise but had never had their hearts loosened from the world, never abandoned all for Christ, never let go of sensual possessions and objects and attractions. They have no interest in the narrow way in living holy lives. They are not rooted and grounded in a saving faith, but a dead faith. And, Lord, for those our hearts go out and we would ask that You would open their eyes. The question is the question that James asked, are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow? Are you willing to look at reality? O, Lord, we pray that many will be in response to the truth and that You would bring them to saving faith that produces works of righteousness that honor You. We thank You that salvation is by grace through faith, unto good works which You have ordained that we should walk in them. We know that You produce this glorious fruit in us by Your grace through Your Spirit as we obey Your Word. May we be faithful in our fruit bearing to bear not just little fruit but to bear much fruit, for in that is the Father glorified. These things we ask in the name of Christ. Amen.

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